

10/12/2018

A large portion of Sand Lake was allowed to drain during the summer of 2018 in what is known as a "draw-down". The draw-down allowed new wetland plants to emerge and produce seed. Wetland plant seed is an incredible food source for waterfowl. Over the last two months, the Refuge has been carefully re-flooding the draw-down area. Water levels are now in excellent condition, and Refuge staff anticipate an impressive fall migration - thanks in part to the successful draw-down.

Fall migration is getting started on and around Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Sand Lake Pool, specifically south of State Hwy 10, is holding an impressive number of mallards, northern pintails, green-winged teal, American wigeon, gadwall, and a variety of other ducks. The observation pull-off on State Hwy 10 (two miles west of Houghton, SD) is an excellent spot to witness the incredible concentration of waterfowl. A few white-fronted geese, snow geese, and swans have also been spotted in the immediate area.

Earlier this week, the Refuge received its first taste of winter with around 4 inches of snow. It is anticipated that this snow will be gone by the weekend. Due to recent rains, less than 5% of corn and soybean fields have been harvested in this area.

Tundra swans: 10-20

Snow geese: 150-200

White-fronted geese: 200-300

Canada geese: 800 - 1000

Ducks: 75,000 - 80,000

Updates will occur weekly until the fall migration ends.

10/18/2018

Warmer temperatures have melted last week's snowfall and has also slowed down the waterfowl migration. No major changes in waterfowl numbers have occurred since the last report. Seasonal temperatures with minimal precipitation is forecasted for the next several days. Corn and soybean harvesting has resumed, and major progress on the harvest is expected within the next week. Waterfowl are beginning to feed in harvested grain fields surrounding the Refuge.

Tundra Swans: 10-20

Snow Geese: 150-200

White-fronted Geese: 200-300

Canada Geese: 800-1000

Ducks: 75,000 - 80,000

The Sand Lake Auto Tour Route will close for the season on 10/19/2018. Please feel free to contact the Refuge Office with any questions.

10/26/2018

Mild temperatures continue to slow the waterfowl migration. Sand Lake Refuge has experienced a small reduction in duck numbers since the last report. Canada geese and snow geese numbers have slightly increased. Tundra swan numbers have also increased. A large number of swans have been reported on Putney Slough just southeast of Sand Lake Refuge. The corn and soybean harvest is nearly 50% complete.

Tundra Swans: 400-500

Snow Geese: 1500-2000

White-fronted Geese: 400-500

Canada Geese: 2000-3000

Ducks: 45,000-50,000

10/31/2018

A major increase in snow geese has occurred over the last 24 hours. The majority of snow geese are using the Sand Lake Pool south of State Highway 10. Cooler temperatures, with a chance of snow, is predicted for this coming weekend. The soybean harvest in the area is complete and corn harvest is nearing completion.

Tundra Swans: 80

Snow Geese: 80,000

White-fronted Geese: 75

Canada Geese: 5,000

Ducks: 60,000

11/6/2018

Waterfowl numbers continue to increase on Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge. There has been an increase in snow geese, white-fronted geese, ducks and Canada geese. Below normal temperatures are predicted for the next several days, with low temperatures nearing single digits and high temperatures below freezing. We anticipate many wetlands will be frozen by the end of this week. If you have been delaying your trip based on a major weather event, the time to come is now!

Tundra Swans: 50

Snow Geese: 200,000

White fronted Geese: 1,000

Canada Geese: 5,500

Ducks: 85,000

11/8/2018

As of yesterday afternoon, 11/7, there was a large influx of both snow geese and ducks at Sand Lake Refuge. Due to below freezing temperatures this week, parts of the Refuge are already starting to freeze up and Refuge staff estimate that Sand Lake will be 98% frozen by this weekend. This is likely the peak of the fall migration, and we expect that the birds will move quickly through the Sand Lake area if this weather pattern continues.

Tundra Swans: 50

Snow Geese: 500,000

White-fronted Geese: 1,000

Canada Geese: 5,500

Ducks: 250,000

11/13/2018

Due to below-freezing temperatures the past week, the Refuge is 98% frozen over. Small pockets of water do exist above and below the Sand Lake water control structure at the south end of the Refuge, and below the Mud Lake water control structure north of Hwy 10. These pockets of water are holding some waterfowl. Milder weather is in the forecast for this week, which may possibly open up more areas of open water in some areas of the Refuge. While this may increase some of our waterfowl numbers, we do not expect to see any significant build-up of waterfowl until next spring.

Snow Geese: 328

Canada Geese: 700

Ducks: 2,000-4,000